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ABSTRACT

Site visits to five correctional institutions in Wisconsin were conducted as part of the development of an evaluation model for the competency-based vocational education (CBVE) project for the Wisconsin Correctional System. The evaluators' perceptions of the CBVE system are presented with recommendations for improvement. Site visits were conducted at Waupun, Fox Lake, Kettle Moraine, Taycheedah, and Black River Falls prisons. Evaluators reported these impressions of the CBVE program: (1) the competency based system was being implemented in the institutions, but the use of the system was still fragmented; (2) correctional education teachers appreciated opportunities to work with staff of the Center for Vocational, Technical, and Adult Education at the University of Wisconsin-Stout in developing curriculum guides and other materials; (3) teachers and staff at the prisons were dedicated and concerned about their work; (4) meeting security requirements of a prison system often causes disruptions in education that are minimized by competency-based and articulated programs; and (5) teachers used the competency-based materials when available and thought they were useful. Recommendations for continuation of the CBVE system are based on these observations and emphasize the importance of regular evaluation. (SLD)

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Site Visit Report
Corrections Education
Evaluation System
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Site Visit Report

Introduction

As a part of the project to develop an evaluation model for the competency-based vocational education project for the Wisconsin Correctional System, the project staff visited five correctional institutions. The purpose of the visits was to obtain information on the nature of the competency-based vocational education system developed by the curriculum project and to identify the environmental factors which influence the operation of the CBE vocational education system. This paper describes the nature of these visits and the evaluators' perceptions of the CBE vocational education system. In addition, recommendations are included at the end of the report.

Purpose

The purpose of the evaluation site visits was to identify the essential components of the CBE vocational education system developed for the Wisconsin Correctional System and to determine factors that influence the operation of the CBE vocational system.

Objectives

Objectives for the site visits were:

1. Identify the ways inmates enter vocational programs and progress through them at various correctional sites.
2. Determine the methods used to link prison-based vocational programs with similar programs offered at Wisconsin's vocational-technical colleges.
3. Identify the typical instructional decisions made in operating the CBE vocational system in a correctional institution.
4. Ascertain the information flows that are required to effectively operate the CBE vocational system.
5. Interview vocational instructors and supervisors on the articulation process and effectiveness of the competency-based data system.

Evaluation Activities

Site visits at Waupun, Fox Lake, Kettle Moraine, Taycheedah and Black River Falls prisons were scheduled by George Smick, Coordinator of Instructional Services at the Wisconsin Division of Corrections. Three staff members from the Center for Vocational, Technical and Adult Education at UW-Stout, Howard Lee, Alan Gilbertson and Orville Nelson participated in the first four on-site visits. These visits were conducted on March 13 and 14, 1988.

The first site visit was conducted at the maximum security prison at Waupun. The next site visited was the medium security prison at Fox Lake. This visit completed the first day of site visits. The Taycheedah women's prison was visited next. The site visits were completed at the Kettle Moraine medium security prison. After the initial four site visits, the project staff decided to also visit a minimum security prison and a parole office. The minimum security site visit was conducted at Black River Falls and parole officers in Eau Claire were interviewed.

The following questions were asked at each of the site visits:

1. What educational programs do you provide for inmates?
2. What information do you receive when an inmate enters a GED or vocational program?
3. What parts of the CBE-Vocational Education System have you implemented?
4. How effective is the CBE-Vocational Education System?
5. Are the CBE-Vocational Education materials used?
6. How do you access and enter data on the CIPIS system?
7. How do prison environment and regulations influence your vocational program?
8. Where do inmates go when they leave your institution? How much notice do you receive when inmates are to be transferred?

Impressions Based on the On-Site Visits to Correctional Institutions

I. Status of the Competency-Based Vocational Education Program

A. The competency-based system is being implemented in the correctional institutions visited. The use of the system is still fragmented since the articulation process and agreement does not have all vocational programs encompassed in it.

B. The correctional education teachers appreciated the opportunities to work with VTAE staff in developing the curriculum guides and other materials. They would like to continue this process.

C. The teachers and staff members interviewed at the five prison sites were dedicated and concerned about their work. They were interested in the competency-based vocational education system and in other ways that they could improve their educational offerings.

D. The primary mission of the correctional system is security. Providing appropriate and adequate security does not always foster a good educational program. Inmates may be moved from one institution to another very quickly to reduce security problems. This causes disruptions in their educational programs. Competency-based and articulated programs will help to reduce the extent of these disruptions.

E. Teachers interviewed during the March on-site visits were using the competency-based educational materials where they were available. They thought these materials were useful. In selected instances they had an opportunity to accept transfer inmates from another institution where the same competency lists were used. The transfer was facilitated when the inmates had a list of the competencies they had completed, or this list was sent to the receiving institution.

II. Recommendations

A. It is important that the competency-based data for prisoners be entered on a regular schedule. Frequently, prisoners are moved to another correctional facility on short notice. Once they arrive at the new facility, staff members of this facility must develop an educational plan for them. If the data files in CIPIS are not up-to-date, this planning process cannot be done effectively and efficiently.

B. All correctional staff members who use the CIPIS data system and competency-based program will need to receive appropriate in-service so they can effectively use these two resources.

C. DOC should determine the feasibility of having parole officers enter follow-up data on the former inmates with whom they are working. Information on the parolee's vocational competencies and the degree to which these match the types of jobs available is very important to improvement of the correctional system's vocational program. The VTAE Follow-Up Form, with some modifications, should be used for this data collection process. If each parole officer uses the same instrument, it could be printed in a form that can be optically scanned so the data entry can be automated. Parole officers should also obtain feedback from the parolee's company or supervisor/employer. The VTAE Employer Form should be used for collecting this information.

D. A state wide advisory committee for correctional vocational education programs should be appointed. This committee would have the responsibility for reviewing the impacts of the current vocational education program, recommending improvements in vocational offerings, and identifying new vocational programs that

will meet a specific labor need. The advisory committee should include a labor market specialist from DILHR, business/industry representatives, VTAE staff, DPI staff, prison education coordinators, Badger Industries Committee representatives, and WBVTAE staff. This committee would also present suggestions on how the correctional system could up-date its equipment to keep it current with that used in business and industry.

E. A model career development program should be developed for prisoners. This program needs to be correlated with the typical sequence of progression through the prison system. Counselors should be able to look at the sentence given to a prisoner and determine likely exit times for the individual. The career development model could then be compared with this time line to plan and schedule appropriate career planning, career education and vocational education activities/experiences. The initial portion of the career development sequence would focus on developing self-awareness, career awareness and basic skills. Specific career plans could be put in place approximately three to four years before the prisoner was eligible to leave the correctional system. Specific vocational training would then begin based on these career plans.

F. The Wisconsin Correctional System should look at identifying generalizable vocational skills that can be used in a variety of occupations. These vocational skills could form the basis for the vocational education experiences offered during the initial phase of the prisoner's term. These skills might include such areas as: work habits, vocational math, computer literacy, problem-solving, and communications skills.

G. The competency-based vocational education system is very appropriate given the constraints and conditions under which vocational

education programs are offered in the Wisconsin Correctional System. The CBE system can greatly facilitate vocational preparation. However, appropriate attention will need to be given to implementing the complete system in each of the correctional institutions. Staff will need to receive appropriate in-service and sufficient monitoring will need to be done to ensure that information is processed into the system in an accurate and timely manner.

H. Vocational and GED/ABE teachers in the correctional system should have an opportunity to meet with their counterparts in the VTAE system. A minimum of one day per year should be available to each teacher for this purpose.

I. The CBE Vocational Education System and vocational offerings in Wisconsin's Correctional System need to be evaluated periodically.